

WILL THE CHINESE LEARNING INITIATIVE EVOKE THE LONG-AWAITED FIFTH MODERNIZATION?

Whenever scholars write about reforms in curriculum or teaching they often shine the spotlight on schools and schoolteachers. Education in formal settings is an important vehicle for responding to globalization. But in a vast and differentiated nation of 1.3 billion citizens, educational reform in China has more to do with learning-out-of-school than listening to (often tyrannical and didactic) schoolteachers.

Knowing the importance of learning in out-of-school settings, the Chinese Communist Party (led by Hu Jintao since November, 2002) is building learning streets, neighborhoods, and cities in an effort to make China a more caring, humane, open, and advanced society. After centuries of isolation, and a hundred years of war, revolution, famine, and struggle, China is attempting to become a harmonious learning society. In China, lifelong education means nurturing human and social capital. But to what extent are social democratic notions of lifelong education congruent with life in a Communist Party-state of 1.3 billion people?

Purpose

The purposes of this study are twofold. First, we demonstrate curriculum reforms can involve more than formal educational settings. Second, we provide a constructive appraisal of China's learning initiative. These purposes were achieved by:

- Analyzing the socio-historical and conceptual foundations of Chinese notions of learning streets, neighborhoods, towns, and cities
- Identifying key elements in the Chinese learning initiative
- Analyzing critical impediments to the Chinese learning initiative

Methodology

This study involved document analysis and informal opportunistic qualitative research methods. In 2004 and 2005, the authors made four trips to China during which they collected extensive data about the learning initiative. Revealing details arose at conferences and Party banquets. While acknowledging Terrill's (2003) warnings about the seductions of Chinese hospitality, the authors found themselves seated next to high Party officials and appreciated the opportunity for free talk.

Documents

Documents informing this work included a book by the Dalian Party School (Huai & Wei, 2004), Cheng's (2004) collection on Jiu Jiang learning city, *Proceedings of Party conferences held at Zhabei* (2004) and *Jiu Jiang* (2004), and a university conference in Shanghai (East China

Normal, 2005). The authors also obtained back issues of *Study Times*, a Communist Party weekly, and secured Chinese-language histories of learning and adult education in Shanghai (Fang, 1991; Wang, Li, & Fang, 1991). The authors worked with Chinese and English language materials.

People

At conferences sponsored by municipal governments and the Central Party School, the authors collected papers and interviewed presenters (who were high-level or local Party officials or practitioners). One did the talking; the other one took notes. Interviews were conducted with:

- Mayors and deputy mayors at a national Communist Party conference
- Veteran adult education cadres residing in Shanghai or Jiangsu
- Officials in the Beijing Central School of the Communist Party
- Publicity officials in Jiu Jiang, the learning city
- Publicity officials from Lushan, the learning mountain
- University professors
- Editors of scholarly journals
- Activists animating learning projects and programs
- Executive Director of the Chinese Adult Education Association
- A member of the Fujian People's Congress
- Editors and staff of *Study Times*, the newspaper of the Central Party School

Several face-to-face meetings were followed by telephone interviews. There were formal interviews in Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangxi, and Guangdong. These lasted from 15 minutes to several hours. At a national Party conference, the authors took advantage of the presence of several hundred mayors and high Party officials from all over China (Boshier, 2004). As well, in April 2005, the authors taught a graduate research course at a key university and advanced the goals of this project by interacting with students and university and Party officials. It would be an overstatement to characterize what happened as grounded theory. However, opinions formed early in the project were tested on later informants. The authors deliberately sought a wide array of views.

Motivation for the Learning Initiative

Some of the learning initiative is coming from the Central School of the Communist Party and its newspaper *Study Times* (published Mondays and distributed to approximately 200,000 Party leaders). Hu Jintao is personally (and politically) committed to building learning communities in China and often makes enquiring phone calls if *Study Times* does not land on his desk by Monday mid-afternoon.

Gao (2005) and his graduate students presented a comprehensive analysis of why the learning initiative is needed. They argued:

- China's modernization demands more attention be paid to individual learners and their life world. Learners should enjoy educational democracy.
- Because of globalization, Chinese citizens must be educated to become members of a planetary village.
- Because of market reforms, workers must be more adaptable and flexible than before.
- Continuing education has become an essential adjunct of changing science and technology.
- The destruction of forests and agricultural land, sandstorms, holes in the ozone layer, polluted air, threats from tsunami, water pollution, and a lack of potable water mean citizens must learn to love and protect nature.
- Low-lying areas of China are endangered by global warming.
- Urban migration is creating a crisis in cities and the countryside. There are millions of rural farmers hiding or otherwise trying to get a foothold (and job) in China's cities. Unemployed workers are believed to account for as much as 70% of criminal activity in urban areas.
- In the market economy, divorce is more prevalent and people need to learn about remarriage, blended families, and relationships. Courtship and human interaction have been profoundly changed by the spatial geographies of market socialism (Farrer, 2002).
- The market economy, drugs, and crime have produced new types of psychological dysfunction. Competition, wealth gaps, ideological conflicts, and the government desire for harmony create new needs for learning.
- Higher education cannot satisfy all needs for learning. Hence, there is a desire to foster learning in nonformal, informal, and local settings.

In sum, they claimed it is time for China to focus on the individual's life (Gao, 2005).

Flexible Lifelong Learning

In the last part of the twentieth century, Chinese citizens were lectured about the four modernizations: the military, science and technology, agriculture, and education. Critics wanted democracy added as a fifth modernization and were disturbed and disappointed by the central government's response to the events of June 4th, 1989, in and around Tiananmen Square. Since 1989, there has been a dramatic opening-up of the Chinese

economy but no sign of serious commitment to democratization.

Starting around 2002, authorities embraced lifelong learning. In China, lifelong learning is a multi-faceted and agile animal linked to ancient ideas and a cult of the new (Kingwell, 2005). There is considerable cynicism concerning campaigns orchestrated by the Party-state. At present, learning is located in the fourth modernization (education), but several informants excitedly told us widespread learning could evoke the long-awaited fifth modernization (democracy).

Within the learning initiative, the first emphasis was on learning organizations (Senge, 1990). In the next two years, it moved to learning communities. By 2004, there was a vigorous effort to build learning cities and a learning (Communist) Party. By 2005, demands to build a learning society were supplemented by propaganda demanding a harmonious society. The need for harmony complements demands for learning.

For the unelected, insecure, and all-knowing Communist Party, to trumpet the virtues of learning might seem like a contradiction. However, after consulting a wide range of leaders, Party members and non-members, we are optimistic. We have concluded:

- The People's Republic's embrace of learning is not a passing fad and may be a step along a road leading to the fifth modernization (democracy).
- There are creative and imaginative elements in the Chinese embrace of learning.
- The chief impulse has little to do with formal education. Municipalities and other custodians of informal and nonformal settings are providing the lead.
- The motivation is multi-faceted and involves competition between municipalities.
- The initiative imbues Faure's (1972) architecture for lifelong education with Chinese characteristics.
- There are impediments to be overcome.

Origins of the Learning Initiative

Foreign Influences

The Chinese interest in learning stems from longstanding tendencies mixed with foreign influences. In 1919, the May 4th movement assailed Chinese acquiescence to Japan and blamed Confucian culture for backwardness. Students from 13 Beijing colleges wanted a stronger Western-style culture. "They scoffed at the authoritarianism of the Chinese family, declared Chinese classical writing a hindrance to progress...and embraced science and democracy as panaceas" (Terrill, 2003, p. 103). The answer, they thought, was to reject Chinese tradition and look to the West. Learning was the key.

The idea that learning should be a societal preoccupation and not

monopolized by schools lay behind the influential UNESCO report titled *Learning to Be* (Faure, 1972). After conducting consultations in most parts of the world (although not China), UNESCO, through this report, urged member states to build learning societies where people could learn in informal and nonformal (as well as formal) settings. Edgar Faure was a progressive former Minister of Education in France and a renaissance man.

There was a lifelong and lifewide dimension to the learning society, as conceptualized by Faure (1972). Ideally, learners could opt in and out of formal and nonformal settings throughout life. UNESCO wanted to ensure scarce learning resources were not all devoted to educating young people in formal settings. Ideally there would be high levels of interaction between children and older people in formal and nonformal settings (Boshier, 1998). When the Faure Report was published, China was already embroiled in the Cultural Revolution. Hence, in the 1970s, Edgar Faure had little impact on the Communist Party. This began to change in the 1980s.

In 1984, the International Council for Adult Education held its “Shanghai symposium” involving Chinese and foreigners. According to Chinese organizers, this meeting led to greater preoccupations with building theory about learning in society (Boshier & Huang, 2005b). In December 1984, Roger Boshier and Ingrid Pipke conducted seminars on first-generation lifelong education (Faure Report) for the East China Normal University and Shanghai Adult Education Research Society. Adult educators were asked to get into groups, discuss questions, write on flip-chart paper, and report back. In 1984 China, these were radical processes.

After Mao died and Deng Xiao Ping became committed to “opening-up” China, foreign books were translated and local texts produced. In 1979, faculty members at East China Normal University (Shanghai) translated *Learning to Be* (Faure, 1972). In 1990, Professor Shen Jin Rong translated Cropley’s (1979) *Lifelong Education: A Psychological Analysis*. As well, Lin Yan Zi translated Roby Kidd’s (1959) *How Adults Learn*. Leading Shanghai adult educators produced *China: Lessons for Practice* (Wang, Lin, Sun, & Fang, 1988), part of the Jossey-Bass New Directions series. Fang (1991) and Wang, Li, and Fang (1991) produced histories of adult education in Shanghai. In 1992, the American John Niemi was in Shanghai, gave lectures on Senge’s (1990) ideas about learning organizations, and visited the No. 1 steel factory twice.

Shanghai as a Learning City

This work had an impact when, in September 1999, Mayor Xu Kuan Di expressed a desire to develop Shanghai as a learning city which adapts to new circumstances (Shi, 2004). Soon thereafter, in April 2001, Jiang Zemin addressed an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit on capacity building and proposed to construct a lifelong learning system and build a learning society (“Jiang Zemin proposed,” 2001). In his report at the 16th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2002, he proposed a learning society in which all the people will learn so as to boost their all-round development (Jiang, 2002).

In August 2004, a research team from the Dalian Municipal Government and Central Party School published a book titled *Building Learning Cities* (Huai & Wei, 2004). This complemented themes explored by Cheng (2004) in Jiu Jiang city. A Learning City Friendship Association was founded and its “development declaration” circulated. Late 2004 was a period of intense activity when Zhabei (2004) held a lively *International Forum on Learning Communities* (November 4–6) and *Study Times* and the municipal government of Jiu Jiang (2004) held an equally stimulating national meeting (November 20–24) for Party leaders. An *International Forum on Innovation of Adult Education and Construction of a Learning Society* was subsequently held in Shanghai at the East China Normal University (2005, April 7–9). One author of this paper attended each of these meetings. The other author attended some of them.

The development declaration, coupled with close study of learning city conference proceedings, contains reasons for optimism. The declaration has several points, presented here in an abbreviated translation (Dalian School of the Chinese Communist Party, 2004): Citizens and citizenship are the foundation of society; the entire nation must engage in learning; education has to be lifelong and lifewide; learning builds modern cities; learning cities need to compete and cooperate; the learning society should be harmonious, comprehensive, and based on science; cities should contain the best material, political, and spiritual characteristics.

Shanghai cherishes its reputation as a place of innovation, where the (Yangzte) river meets the sea and East meets West. Ye (2005) was a member of the expert group transforming Zhabei into a learning district. His vision echoes Western preoccupations but foregrounds the Shanghai context:

- Learning will be fashionable. Learners will mostly be self-directed.
- Learning will be a core function of the city.
- City authorities will establish an atmosphere for innovation.
- Laws will guarantee the individual’s basic rights to learn.
- Authorities will make use of a broad range of resources for learning—more than in other cities.
- Learning organizations will be built in all parts of the city.
- A citywide lifelong learning system will depend, to a large extent, on digital technologies.
- Shanghai must become ecological and healthy.
- Citizens should live in a civilized and cultured manner.
- There must be openness and willingness to embrace multiple cultures in the context of an international city.
- Shanghai learners should be intrinsically motivated.
- Because of a burgeoning population, congestion, and pollution, information technology should be harnessed to foster learning and deliver distance education.

The key to achieving these goals resides in the willingness of the Party to open itself to competing ideas and embrace learning as a core aspect of Communist operations. Hence, the “key to building a learning city...is to build a learning Party and government” (Ye, 2005, p. 1).

Elements of the Chinese Learning Initiative

Scope

There are more than 61 places trying to become learning cities in China. Examples include Zhabei (Shanghai) and Jiu Jiang (Jiangxi Province). Dalian is an attractive learning city and port in Liao Ning Province in northeast China. Other learning cities include Changzhou, Xiamen, Nanjing, and Chengdu. At the 2005 East China Normal University conference, Hangzhou activists snorted when the authors reported that Lushan had been declared a learning mountain (Boshier & Huang, 2005a). “It’s all about money,” said one of the activists. Had those seduced by Lushan seen historic West Lake in Hangzhou? Although partly in jest, this exchange exposed the competitive nature of the learning initiative. Learning leads to power. Power attracts money.

Governance

The central government (in Beijing) offers resources, encouragement and instructions on how to proceed, but it is municipalities who organize learning activities. Much of the initiative is in the Central Party School in Beijing where the weekly newspaper *Study Times* is the vehicle for urging Party officials to innovate and build the learning city. In Shanghai, the Ming De Research Centre for the Learning Organisation provides consultants and researchers equipped to help build learning organizations, streets, villages, and cities (Ming De Institute, 2003).

Throughout China, those building learning cities are keen to learn from foreigners. But, in many respects, they have transcended limitations of Western work through creating learning mountains, families, streets, and clusters (e.g. the top factory, top government, and top community cluster). Officials recognize the need to recruit learning-oriented people into the upper echelons of the Party state. However, like Westerners, they are concerned about resources, momentum, and evaluation. During an extended interview with Wang, Y. F. (personal communication, April 21, 2005), a member of the Ming De Centre, we were asked for advice about how to evaluate a learning street or festival. He queried: What should we look for? Should we look at processes, as well as outcomes?

Sites for Learning

The Chinese learning initiative has spawned settings for learning which do not typically exist in the West. Here are examples:

Geographic Entities

- Learning cities
- Learning districts
- Learning towns
- Learning neighborhoods
- Learning villages
- Learning streets
- Learning community-clusters
- Learning mountains

Institutional Entities

- Learning hospitals
- Learning police stations
- Learning factories
- Learning businesses
- Learning families
- Learning Communist Party

Quest for Harmony

Chinese citizens are sceptical of movements hatched in Beijing. In late 2004, there was much talk about building the learning society. By 2005, there was a harder line on Taiwan, large anti-Japanese street demonstrations, and new worries about rebellious ethnic minorities and migrant farmers. Between December 2004 and March 2005, learning city talk was supplemented by exhortations to build a harmonious society.

Citizens were urged to expand their horizons to better understand the environment, politics, law, resources, and ethnic groups other than their own (Wang, 2005). Citizens are urged to live in harmony with the environment, all social classes, all regions of China, and to understand the ecology of human behaviour. Learning is vital to harmony. However, the desire for harmony can also be read as a warning to restless migrant farmers or ethno-cultural groups in peripheral territories (e.g. Tibet, Xin Jiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia). One informant, a member of a Provincial People's Congress, noted adult educators everywhere have their "spirits and dreams." Lifelong learning, the learning society, and the harmonious society were all points on a triangle labeled "modernization." Each point helps erode the gap between the rich and the poor in China.

What Gets Learned

There is not a single template for learning. Some places have created special study environments. Others provide daily study/discussion sessions in communities or the workplace. Throughout 2004 there were

“eleven big learning activities” at Lushan (Yu, 2004a, 2004b). Other places have learning weeks and festivals. Everywhere, the idea is to combine learning with life. There is an emphasis on providing feedback to learners, fostering reflection, and building a collective dimension. A comprehensive description of possibilities is found at Shuang Yu learning village, a triumph of imagination at the intersection of tradition and modernity (Boshier & Huang, 2005c).

The format in Zhabei is not the same as in Lushan, Chengdu, or Chaoyang. At Zhabei, adults can study Chinese history, drama, art, poetry, politics, literature, dancing, physical exercise, or health (including HIV/AIDS prevention). There are programs designed to build technical competence (particularly involving computers and machinery). Lushan—the learning mountain—has many of these activities but supplemented functionalist (techno-rational) preoccupations with interpretivism (Boshier & Huang, in press). Hence, learners are expected to reflect, calm down, repair relationships, examine their soul, and find themselves in the mountain. Lushan is already a leading centre for the study of Buddhism and intends to be the foci for worldwide environmental education.

Departments of civilization have adopted processes resembling Western constructivist and andragogical adult education (Knowles, 1980), which builds on learner subjectivity and experience. Architects of the learning mountain want citizens—old and young—to derive inner and multiple meanings from Lushan. As Zhong (2004), deputy-editor of *Study Times*, said, there is no one way to see it. There are no right or wrong answers. Learning should be based on individual interests and not occur under pressure. John Dewey, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow would all feel at home on the learning mountain.

Shanghai theorists stress the importance of holistic thinking (e.g., Y. F. Wang, personal communication, April 21, 2005). Accidents and environmental problems arise from atomistic thinking. As well as dismantling borders between learning and life, the learning initiative ought to foster ecological thinking where people consider the environment and each other. Rigid pedagogy is not appropriate. Instead, teaching and learning processes should be flexible, participatory, and informed by local realities (Y. F. Wang, personal communication, April 21, 2005). Hence, in the meantime, schools and universities ought not to take the lead.

Critical Issues

The authors are impressed by many facets of the Chinese learning initiative. But not everything is perfect, and our next task is to analyze impediments. Each impediment to the learning initiative points to the need to theorise learning and, in a surprising irony, deploy critical (maybe even Marxist) perspectives in twenty-first century China.

Contradictions

At the same time as the Communist Party declares its commit-

ment to learning, members have been ordered into mandatory education (some say indoctrination) sessions where, in disturbing echoes of the Cultural Revolution, they are obliged to make self-criticisms and write essays. While citizens are being told to think big thoughts, engage in learning, and be open, human rights are in jeopardy, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and AIDS activists are harassed, and there are Internet censorship, widespread corruption (Levy, 2002), stringent media controls and, amongst certain local Party officials, a disregard for the law.

Movement Fatigue and Skepticism

The Communist Party used to depend on wall posters to spread propaganda. Today, complex issues are still reduced to slogans. Billboards extol the virtues of the harmonious society, learning society, innovation, nature, and the Communist Party. Examples of recently seen slogans include "Brave fighter against SARS," "Olympic math winners," "Model Chinese citizens," "Be honest and brave," "Struggle for the Communist cause," "Innovation builds the future."

Public displays are designed to foster informal learning and arise from Party-state discursive formations concerned with morality, discipline, and patriotism. However, without exception, every taxi driver we asked was skeptical of billboards erected by the Party-state.

Beside skepticism, there is fatigue. Earlier campaigns created widespread social harm. About 50 million died because of the Great Leap Forward—otherwise known as the 1958 Great Famine (Ying, 1997). Tibet lost an estimated 25% of its population during the Great Leap Forward. Mao also had a bizarre sparrow abatement campaign with slogans urging citizens to scare birds by banging pots (Chang & Halliday, 2005; Terrill, 1999, 2003). But it was the Cultural Revolution that created more-or-less permanent skepticism concerning the Chinese Communist Party. Fatigue, hesitation, and doubts about the sincerity and abilities of the Party could derail the learning initiative. Even dressed up in digitized special effects, hortatory slogans about learning are easily ignored or dismissed as irrelevant.

Rigid Pedagogy and Scars of Schooling

The visitor to China sees two teaching styles in key universities. In the first, students sit on forms bolted to the floor and the instructor reads from behind a podium at the front. In the second, the seats are the same but the instructor writes on and talks to the blackboard.

Many Chinese adults associate learning with teacher authoritarianism and scary exams. Hence, slogans about learning are easily ignored and replaced by easier tasks like watching television, playing mah-jong, karaoke, dancing, table tennis, or, increasingly, basketball. In this respect China is probably not much different from the West. Millions of adults are scared by schooling. Why go back for more? Hence, learning has to be distinguished from schooling. Adults must be reassured learning can be fun and is not a synonym for schooling.

Despite being scared by schooling, most Chinese parents will make enormous sacrifices to get their children into key elementary and secondary schools as well as universities. For many citizens, learning in out-of-school settings (such as villages or neighborhoods) will never have the caché (or deliver the rewards) of formal education. It is hard for architects of the learning initiative to overcome the Chinese obsession with formal education.

Absence of NGOs

In the West, many attempts to build learning cities are sponsored by non-governmental organizations. Hence, in Faris's (2002) framework, NGOs are one of the five sectors that ought to form partnerships with government, businesses, and others. Apart from underground organizations, there are few genuine NGOs in China. Most are Party organizations. Graduate students at a key Chinese university told us they could not envisage what it means to have NGOs. "What are they? I cannot imagine what they would be like," said a Shanghai graduate student.

The absence of NGOs and distrust of grassroots movements mean there are fewer nonformal educational settings in China than overseas. Deng Xiao Ping's opening-up policy brought a willingness to tolerate (even celebrate) diverse viewpoints. Evidence for this is seen in the vibrant Shanghai art scene. But it is still difficult to get access to a broad array of books and perspectives that enrich learning. The absence of widespread and unfettered Internet access aggravates the problem.

Declining Legitimacy of the Party

Chinese citizens are disturbed by corrupt public officials and, as such, not inclined to listen to exhortations about joining a learning street or neighborhood. Corruption used to involve 58 or 59-year-old officials preparing for retirement. These days, it is less differentiated by age, rank, or place of residence, and corrupt individuals are organized into networks. Chinese intellectuals are not sanguine. As Zheng (1999) explained, they worry about

how the political legitimacy of the government can be established
...with the decline of the CCP's traditional ideology, the crisis of national identity has become severe, especially among Chinese intellectuals. At the societal level, with rapid modernization and economic growth, money worship has come to people's daily lives. When people get rich, they find they are living in a moral vacuum. (p. 71)

Many Party officials lack the moral authority to urge citizens into the learning initiative. Certain academic informants thought learning streets contained echoes of nosy neighborhood committees surveilling citizens and making reports to the Party. Gossip is a vital and continuing part of village life and urban alleyways. Moving from congested alley houses to a highrise changes the spatial geography of human interaction but not the potential for poking noses into other people's business. Hence, when

Party activists try to recruit citizens for the learning initiative, they can incur resistance, apathy, anger, and even hatred. The way to avert this problem would be to open spaces for non-party NGOs.

Limits on Intellectual Freedom

The Party would like citizens to learn things relevant to the economy, patriotism, and harmony. But once citizens take on the attributes of lifelong learning, there is a chance they will grow critical of unidimensional exhortations and demand a broad-range of learning materials. Genuine learning requires intellectual space.

Chinese history is choked with instances where citizens were urged to learn and share and then punished for doing so. During the 1956 hundred flowers campaign, Mao urged citizens to express their views. People shared their thoughts in unexpected ways. The movement spread to the Democracy Wall at Beijing University before Mao suppressed it. In the end, 520,000 people—1 in 20 non-communist intellectuals and officials in China—were sent away for labor-reform and rectification for speaking their thoughts (Terrill, 1999, 2003). This is only one of numerous examples for why prudent Chinese keep quiet. Confronted with our questions about passive citizens, Party stalwarts assert that the key is to build a learning Party.

Hayhoe and Pan (2005) interviewed presidents of important universities like Fudan, Jiao Tong, Zhejiang, and East China Normal. The interviewees complained about the fact that “efforts to reach world class standing...have been hampered...by limits on intellectual freedom which constrain initiatives in thought and culture” (p. 1). They complained in particular about forbidden zones erected around AIDS and SARS or politically sensitive areas such as the Tiananmen tragedy of 1989 and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). At Fudan University, the President praised the charter at Tokyo University and yearned for more intellectual space for his own faculty-members and students. If presidents of elite universities feel constrained, what about ordinary citizens? For the learning initiative to become a mass movement and lead to the fifth modernization, there needs to be more intellectual freedom, and learning should be fun.

Revolution is a Dinner Party

Chairman Mao claimed revolution is not a dinner party. But, on this issue, like many other points, he may have been wrong. The Chinese learning initiative is a remarkable educational reform effort with enormous implications for policy, curriculum, teaching, and learning. It represents a stimulating blend of Western thinking about lifelong learning imbued with Chinese characteristics. It has many surprising characteristics—such as citizens being urged to find themselves in a learning mountain (Boshier & Huang, 2005b, in press). Other innovations include fostering learning at micro (families, neighborhoods, streets) and macro (cities, society) levels. The most extraordinary element is the widely-supported desire to build a learning Communist Party. Even officials at the highest levels acknowledge

it is a contradiction for the Party to try to build a learning society while not practicing what it preaches. If this desire gathers momentum, the fifth modernization could be coming over the horizon.

In the 1970s, Mao and his gang-of-four were distracted by power struggles and paid no attention to Edgar Faure's learning society initiatives. While other countries implemented recommendations from the Faure report, Chinese education was in chaos. But we witness a completely different picture now. Although China was late for the learning festivities, a merry feast is now in progress.

The Chinese Communist Party likes big projects (e.g., Three Gorges) and does not mess around. It will be a challenge to imbue busy urbanites and depressed rural peasants with an enthusiasm for learning. But, like many things in China, the learning initiative is large, interesting, and bursting with contradictions. Hence, it is certain Westerners can learn from the Chinese experience. In the meantime, up on Lushan Mountain, in Zhabei alleyways, and other places in China, one finds color, music, laughter, and people learning together and having fun, much like a dinner party. Is it also a revolution? Stay tuned, time will tell.

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